



***POLITICS IN  
WOMEN'S  
LIBERATION:***

***is  
it  
necessary?***

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One election follows another — campaign promises, politicking for votes, bills in Parliament and white papers — and women are still oppressed. For good reason, then, many women say we should stay out of politics and get on with the fight for our liberation.

But Women's Caucus is involved in politics. Not the realm of traditional politics of getting women elected to office or forming a lobby or pressure group to try to get certain programs through Parliament, but extra-parliamentary politics. We are working outside the present system because we have not been able to attain our rights within the system.

Politics deals with the distribution of power among members and groups in society. Power means the ability to do or get what one wants — to have access and opportunity to achieve one's goals. Ideally, power would be distributed among all people in such a way that all members of a society benefit equally. Presently, we know that women, as a group, have less power than men, just as Indians have less power than whites and the board of directors of MacMillan-Bloedel have more power than working people.

Women's Caucus is attempting to achieve that ideal distribution of power. But before we can begin to plan a strategy to re-organize the distribution of power, we must fully understand how and why we, as women, have been denied power, who has the power and how they have been able to keep that power. By making this kind of political analysis of society, we can draw conclusions as to how society can be changed.

We experience the way power is distributed throughout society in our day-to-day lives — in the family there are power relationships between parents and children, between husband and wife. Parents force their children to behave in a certain manner; a husband, earning the paycheck, exerts a great deal of control (or power) over how it is spent. On our jobs, we do what the boss tells us or face the power he has to fire us.

And we act upon that knowledge we have acquired — everyday we make political decisions about what will benefit us. As a worker, we decide whether or not to join a union or to go on strike. In the home, we play games that will convince the man he really wants what we want. We attempt to use what power is available to us to better our situation — as individuals we have little power, within a group we are much stronger. The worker alone can be easily fired if she insists on a decent wage. The wife's tears may not be effective. Only a group organized to attain certain goals has any chance of being effective.

#### **World Views**

But higher wages and control over the paycheck doesn't bring about a re-distribution of power. The goals women set for themselves and the strategy we develop to attain those goals depends on our understanding of this society.

Generally, we have been presented with two opposing views of society — these are loosely termed the left and the right. Each starts their analysis with different assumptions about the nature of man and the nature of society. Conservatives have been distrustful of man's basic nature and have emphasized the need for organizations which restrain and control individuals. They believe that "law and order" must be firmly upheld or individuals will destroy each other and society. The right assumes that inborn differences among human beings give rise to unequal rights and privileges and this inequality is inevitable. Their most important assumption is that the status quo is basically good and a few minor reforms will solve most problems. The logic of this view of society leads us to conclude that because Indians are deprived economically, they must be inferior or because women are biologically able to bear children, they should have the sole responsibility for rearing them.

On the other hand, radicals have been distrustful of institutions in society which emphasize control. They take an optimistic view of man's nature. Inequality among human beings results from the way society is organized to keep those with power in power and to keep others out. Inequality, far from being inevitable, can be and must be eliminated by a re-organization of society.

These are two views of the world. We all have some form of world view which helps us explain our experiences and the events happening around us.

The world view women tend to learn is that women's place is in the home, we are naturally inferior and incapable of making important decisions. If individual women question this world view, we are led to believe we are failures for not finding total happiness and satisfaction within our assigned role. However, many women have rejected this traditional view and have begun the process of developing a new one — an analysis which will explain their oppression and how to remove it.

Although many women might not classify themselves as on the left, I would guess that most would agree with the basic world view of the left. If we accepted the statement that innate differences among humans logically leads to differences in rights and privileges, we would have to docilely accept our traditional role as a woman and concentrate our efforts on adjusting to that role.

#### **Political Analysis**

Analyzing society, Women's Caucus has found that the oppression of women primarily benefits the employers — the businessmen, the owners of corporations and industry.

Research on the abortion campaign has shown us that drug companies make profits on birth control pills and have not felt it necessary to develop safe birth control. Because birth control pills for men would be a relatively simple chemical, the companies have avoided research in this area in order to protect their profits. Governments would rather use money to subsidize industries than provide decent health care for women.

Discussions in the working women's workshop have revealed that because women are defined as wives and mothers, because there is not adequate day care and because of job discrimination, women can be used as a pool of cheap labor. Many women need work and are forced to accept any job, no matter how low paying or if it is temporary or if it offers no job security. Employers can hire women for low pay and not hire men and women for decent wages. Women are laid off and forced back into the home when employers no longer need their labor. When the economy expands, women can be easily attracted back into the work force. Women who cannot find or afford day care are forced to work part-time — an advantage to an employer who does not have to pay fringe benefits, sick leave or vacation pay.

These are two examples of the kind of analysis we must do in order to understand our oppression. By sharing our experiences on the job, in the home and in schools we begin to see the totality of our oppression. It is not a matter of equal pay for equal work, the right to abortion, the end of sexual objectification, but a change in a society which control's a woman's entire life because the oppression and exploitation of women is essential to the society. Our liberation means that the kind of society which now exists will no longer be able to maintain itself.

### Strategy

Understanding who has power and why they refuse to meet our demands, dictates our strategy. If we concentrated on only one issue — such as the right to free abortions on demand — we would still be faced with many other kinds of discrimination. Therefore, we are concerned with organizing women around all the issues which oppress them. A working woman is concerned with job security, equal pay for equal work, equal job opportunities, education and job training, child care, abortion, sexual objectification etc. We know she cannot achieve these aims alone; therefore the strategy must be that the women she works with, women who face the same problems, must fight for these demands. Together, working women have the potential to bring about this re-organization of power.

Examining any society through history shows that people in power do not give up power willingly. They benefit from the status quo, from our oppression. The only way we can ensure that our demands for basic human rights are met is to be powerful enough to *make* it so. This means a struggle for the people without power against the people with power. If our rights are given to us as a charitable gesture, they can just as easily be taken away.

An organization which acts to bring in other women to work around issues which directly affect their day-to-day lives will build a mass movement. Because we have been channeled into a passive role, because we feel inferior and incapable, the real beginning is when women find they can act, they can participate in activities which directly change their lives. That first step of realizing that we, together, can win is the first step toward liberation.

As more and more women contribute to our understanding, our analysis and our strategies, we will become more effective in our struggle. We can learn from other movements fighting against the same power structure, but our own strategy must come out of our own experiences, and our own analysis. We, as women, are the only ones who know the oppression and it is women who ultimately have the responsibility to eliminate that oppression.

Although our struggle is against the same corporations and the same government which oppresses Indians, youth, the unemployed, etc. we must be organized in a separate women's movement. If we act to "help-out" minority groups it would be paternalistic. It would also pressure many women to act on an abstract level they do not totally understand. Those who have been in Women's Caucus for some time have gone through certain experiences together which brought us to our level of awareness — or consciousness. Women facing the day to day problems of a family to support on meagre earnings are denied the luxury of defining problems in abstract terms. It is only after a woman comes together with other women to share experiences and to act in a collective way that the system of oppression becomes relevant.

When we accomplish our goal of bringing about radical, revolutionary changes in society — the goal of an equalized distribution of power — we will be bringing it about for all people. Women attacking the institutions, businesses, corporations and governments which ignore our demands for equal rights are attacking the same enemies that other groups are fighting. It is through these concrete struggles that we link the struggle of all human beings for liberation.

Politics is essential to women's liberation.

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